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## Gandhi Impresses U.S. Power Brokers

Indian Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi's four days in the United States were enough to change the direction of nearly four decades of uneasy relations between the world's two largest democracies.

The youthful Indian leader not only got along famously with the septuagenarian American president in a 30-minute private conversation but also managed to impress even the most skeptical and hard-bitten of Washington's power brokers. The visit laid a solid foundation for improved ties between India and the United States, which have frequently been at odds over the years.

Senior administration officials told our associate Indy Badhwar that the Gandhi trip was a definite turning point, that it was a personal triumph for the former airline pilot whose political experience effectively began last Oct. 31 upon the assassination of his mother, Indira.

"We hit it off!" exclaimed President Reagan after their one-on-one meeting. The president, Gandhi said, was "frank, forthright, warm and very human."

CIA Director William J. Casey said of Gandhi: "He has made a tremendous impression here."

"This was certainly one of the most successful visits I've seen," said U.S. Information Agency Director Charles Z. Wick. "The young man is quite remarkable."

What makes these reactions particularly significant is that in speeches before Congress and the National Press Club, Gandhi had openly criticized the Reagan administration for its "Star Wars" initiative and for its failure to keep Pakistan from building a nuclear bomb. The administration's

refusal to take offense at these rebukes showed Reagan's desire to improve relations with India.

Gandhi worked his considerable charm to equal advantage in meetings with the news media and other groups. While he was polite and attentive, he managed to get across the image of a self-respecting, confident leader of a major power, not some obsequious Third World politician looking for a handout from the U.S. Treasury.

Remarking on the "Rajiv phenomenon," a senior diplomat explained: "You can really talk to the guy. Even when he disagrees he's not preachy or tendentious. His grandfather [Jawaharlal Nehru] tended to be aloof and aristocratic. His mother was often sullen and withdrawn."

The diplomat added that one solid result of Gandhi's visit is that the two countries "are now in a position to resolve future crises and differences that may arise in an atmosphere of true friendship."

Another thing Gandhi accomplished was to lay to rest any doubts administration officials had that he was really in charge in India. There had been some suspicion that the young, inexperienced prime minister was relying heavily on a small coterie of advisers inherited from his mother's regime.

"That Rajiv is totally in command is in very little doubt," a diplomat said later. "He was always in control. And while he was never afraid to speak his mind, he did so in a disarming way."

While differences between the two countries will continue to exist, Gandhi managed to persuade the Reagan administration that India wants to be a friend—and will be a valuable one. That's quite an achievement in just four days.